

July 15, 1999

**OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET APPROVAL OF
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS**

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive provides instructions on how to comply with the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) when conducting Customer Satisfaction Surveys. The PRA of 1995 provides special processing procedures for the expedited approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for "generic customer surveys."

2. BACKGROUND

a. The PRA is designed to prevent undue burden on individuals who are asked for information by the Federal government. The Act requires Federal agencies to obtain prior approval before collecting the same information from 10 or more individuals. OMB has responsibility for evaluating requests for collecting information, giving approval, and tracking the number of "burden hours" imposed on the public providing information to Federal agencies.

b. Executive Order 12862, Setting Customer Service Standards, requires Federal agencies to conduct surveys (or equivalents; e.g., focus groups) to determine the kind of services its customers need, as well as levels of satisfaction with existing services. Customer satisfaction surveys and focus groups are tools for learning about agency services from a customer's prospective. These emphasize customer perceptions, while traditional program evaluations address the objective outcomes of a program.

c. **Definitions**

(1) **Burden Hours** means the total time, effort, or financial resources expended by persons to generate, maintain, retain, disclose or provide information to or for a Federal agency. This is computed by multiplying the number of respondents, the number of each individual responses and the average number of minutes spent on each response and dividing by 60 (respondents x responses x minutes divided by 60 = annual burden hours).

(2) **Collection of Information** means obtaining or soliciting information by means of identical questions, whether mandatory or voluntary, from ten or more individuals in a 12-month period. This includes any means of collection, questionnaire, telephonic interview, focus group, etc.

(3) **Information Collection Budget** is the total number of burden hours allocated annually to each Federal Agency. Like a monetary budget, these resources continually shrink.

(4) **Respondents** are the number of individuals who respond to a collection of information.

(5) **Responses** are the number of times each respondent answers a collection of information.

(6) **Ten or more individuals** does not include Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees in the conduct of their duties.

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3. POLICY: It is VHA policy to meet or exceed patients' expectations for the medical care and services provided by VA medical facilities. In the atmosphere of "Reinventing Government" and implementing Executive Order 12862, OMB has assigned VHA a generic clearance number for small customer satisfaction surveys. Although we received a generic clearance number, the surveys must still undergo an internal approval process and obtain OMB approval.

a. VHA is assigned a proportion of the total number of burden hours allocated VA for customer satisfaction surveys. These hours are to be used to determine how we can improve our service, the kind of services our customers want, customer satisfaction with existing services, and how or if customer satisfaction has changed in response to VHA reengineering efforts. The total burden hours will be monitored to ensure compliance with the provisions of the generic clearance.

b. No survey (written, telephonic, computer-generated or focus group) asking the same questions of ten or more individuals can be conducted without the prior approval of OMB. OMB has agreed to provide a quick turn-around for customer satisfaction surveys. Regardless of intent, these information collections:

(1) May only solicit voluntary opinions;

(2) May not replace traditional evaluation surveys that measure program objectives; and

(3) May not be used to collect information required to obtain or maintain eligibility for a VA program or benefit.

NOTE: *If the data collection does not meet these criteria, contact the VHA OMB Clearance Liaison at 202-273-8310 for guidance.*

4. ACTION: To obtain OMB approval to conduct these well-defined, low-burden generic surveys, the following information should be submitted to the Chief Information Officer (193B1), VHA Headquarters, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington DC 20420:

a. A point-of-contact who can best answer questions regarding the content of the submission, and a proposed distribution date;

b. A brief summary of objectives, how the survey results will be used, and for what purpose;

c. The number of respondents or estimated number of people who will participate in the survey (or focus group);

d. The number of responses or number of times each person is expected to complete the survey (or participate in the focus group); and

e. How many minutes it is estimated to take an individual to complete the survey or attend the meeting or focus group.

f. Final or near final version of the survey instrument (test questions, telephone script, focus group script or protocol, or meeting outline and/or agenda, etc.) showing:

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(1) The OMB control number for VHA generic surveys, 2900-0570; and

(2) A PRA Statement adapted to the circumstances under which the individual responds and which contains the following elements:

The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 requires us to notify you that this information collection is in accordance with the clearance requirements of section 3507 of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. We may not conduct or sponsor, and you are not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB number. We anticipate that the time expended by all individuals who complete this form (or participate in this focus group) will average XX minutes. This includes the time it will take to read instructions, gather the necessary facts and fill out the form. Response is entirely voluntary. Failure to respond will have no adverse impact on any benefits to which you may be entitled.

g. Identify steps taken to ensure that the same people are not surveyed twice in the same survey or similar surveys. This will require coordination to prevent redundant information collection. Such coordination would have the added benefit of preventing unnecessary work.

h. If the survey has not been disapproved within 6 weeks, collection may begin.

5. REFERENCES

a. Executive Order 12862, Setting Customer Service Standards.

b. Title 5 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1320, Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

c. MP-1, Part II, Chapter 4 and Appendix A thereto.

6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Chief Information Officer (193B1), is responsible for this Directive.

7. RESCISSION: None. This VHA Directive will expire July 31, 2004.

Thomas L. Garthwaite
Acting Under Secretary for Health

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